

**Statement on the Resolution Honoring the Life and
Accomplishments of Mrs. Coretta Scott King
Rep. John Lewis
January 31, 2006**

Mr. Speaker I rise today with a heavy heart to honor the life and accomplishments of Mrs. Coretta Scott King. The passing of Coretta Scott King is a tragic loss for the movements of peace, justice, and equality around the world. She was a leader in her own right. She was the glue that held the Civil Rights Movement together. Long before she married Dr. King, she was an activist for peace and non-violence.

Mr. Speaker, it is very difficult for me to speak about this beautiful, charming, graceful, and dignified woman who became the personification of the best that America had to offer.

She grew up, as I did, in rural Alabama where segregation and racial discrimination were real. She tasted the bitter fruits of racism, but she didn't give up, she didn't give in, she didn't give out. She received a very good education at Antioch College and the New England Conservatory of Music.

She met Martin Luther King Jr. while they were both studying in Boston. They fell in love, they got married, and they returned to the South, the capitol of the old confederacy, the city of Montgomery.

He became the pastor of an old church, Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery. This little red brick church stood in the shadow of the capitol building of the state of Alabama.

Dr. King thought he would live the life of a Baptist minister, and Coretta thought she would be a preacher's wife. But they decided to respond to the courage of Rosa Parks who, on Dec. 1, 1955, refused to give up her seat on a city bus in Montgomery. Dr. King emerged as a leader in the modern-day Civil Rights Movement, and Coretta was by his side every step of the way.

I first met Mrs. King, in 1957, when I was only 17, and I was a student in Nashville, Tennessee.

She was traveling around America, especially in cities in the South, telling the story of the Montgomery Movement through song. She was so beautiful, so inspiring. She would sing a little, and she would talk a little, and through her singing and talks, she inspired an entire generation.

At times when Dr. King could not be present or had another commitment, Coretta was there to speak, to sing, to encourage. She marched with us in 1963 at the March on Washington; in 1965 she marched with us from Selma to Montgomery.

She was not just a celebrity. She was a very warm person. She had the ability, she had the capacity to forget about her own circumstances and get involved in the circumstances of others.

For the past 20 years she has sent me a birthday card on every single birthday, or she might send me a book. I still have every single one of those cards and the books. I will cherish them always.

After the assassination of her husband, she did not hide in some dark corner.

She did not become bitter or hostile. A few days after the assassination, she led more than 50 thousand people through the streets of Memphis. And later she would travel with many us through the heart of the Deep South, through the Black Belt of Alabama, through the Delta of Mississippi, through Southwest Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina.

She went all out to create a living memorial to Dr. King called the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Non-Violent Social Change. She lobbied the Congress.

She organized and mobilized the American people to make Dr. King's birthday a national holiday. And because of her efforts generations yet unborn will learn his message of peace, and they will hear about his struggle for equal justice in America.

Mr. Speaker, Coretta Scott King, must be looked upon as one of the founding mothers of the new America, for through her action, through her deeds, she helped liberate us all. This nation is a better place because she passed this way.

But Coretta Scott King must be looked upon not just as a citizen of America, but as a citizen of the world. This world is a better place because she passed this way. Mr. Speaker, she will be deeply missed. I urge all of my colleagues to support this resolution.